

# Effective strategies for engaging with SMB customers

Eryc Eyl, Senior Solution Director, Customer Experience

Daniel Doutre, Senior Analyst, Market Research

Erica Bishop, Associate Analyst, Customer Engagement Solutions

Sarah Baker, Analyst, Market Research



# Your speakers for today



**Eryc Eyl**

Senior Solution Director  
Customer Experience



**Sarah Baker**

Analyst  
Market Research



**Dan Dautre**

Senior Analyst  
Market Research



**Erica Bishop**

Associate Analyst  
Customer Engagement Solutions

# This is a virtual roundtable discussion

- Participation is essential
- Use Zoom's **chat** feature to pose questions and share comments
- Rename yourself in Zoom to include the name of your utility
- Unmute your line when you're ready to speak (\*6)
- Turn your video on



# Key takeaways



Understand how your small and midsize business (SMB) customers' perceptions and willingness to work with you might affect their overall satisfaction and perceived value of your utility



Identify the main sectors that make up your SMB customer base, and create strategic sector plans to meet their unique needs



Use segmentation and marketing strategies to fit the needs of each SMB sector, and prioritize marketing efforts on your most important SMB sectors



Use the channels that your SMB customers prefer as you communicate about the utility offerings that will meet their needs

A nighttime cityscape with illuminated buildings and a complex highway interchange, serving as the background for the slide.

# Getting to know your SMB customers

# Small and midsize businesses ...

- 61.2 million small business employees
  - 46.8% of US employees
- Between 1994 and 2018, US small business employment grew by 20.1 percent, reaching 61.2 million employees in 2018.
- Women made up 47.3 percent of workers and owned 43.1 percent of businesses.
- Racial minorities made up 24.8 percent of workers and owned 19.0 percent of businesses

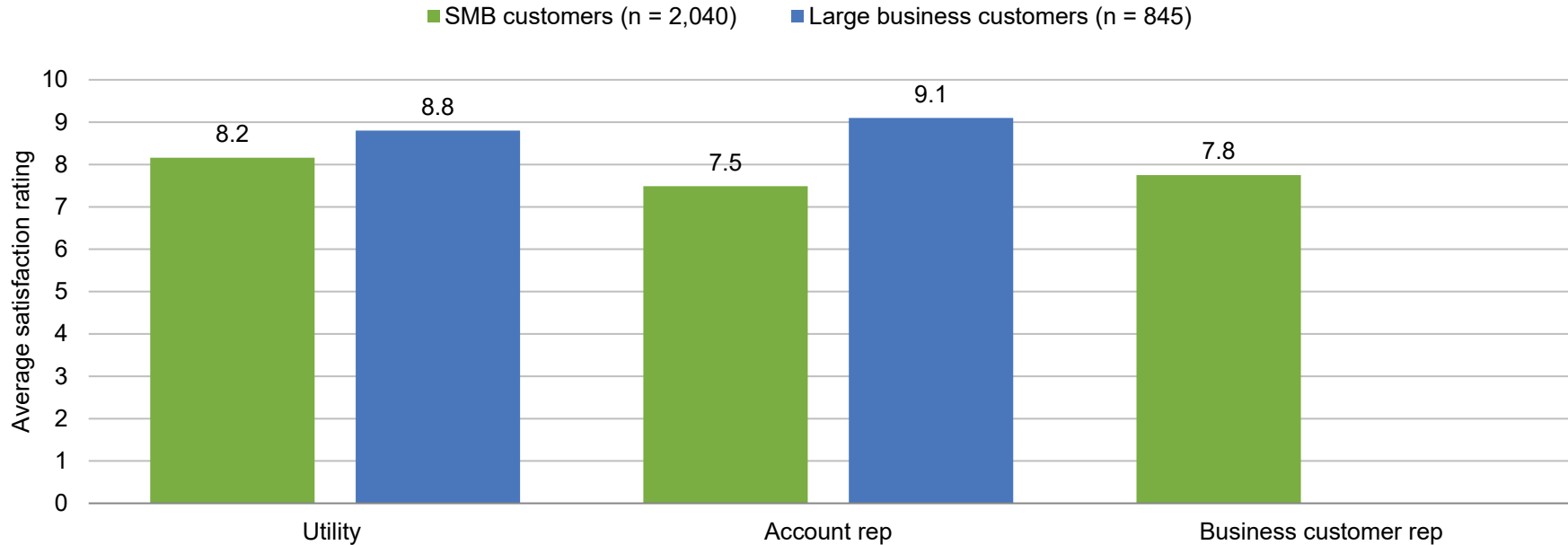
Source: [2021 Small Business Profile](#), SBA Office of Advocacy



# In one word, describe your organization's relationship with your SMB customers



# SMB customers need your attention



**Base:** Large, small, and midsize business customers included in the 2021 study (n varies). **Question S1\_3:** How satisfied are you with your utility? **S2\_5:** How satisfied are you with your assigned utility account representative? **S3\_4:** How satisfied are you with your utility's business customer representatives? **Notes:** SMB = small and midsize business. Ratings are on a 10-point scale, where 1 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest. © E Source (2021 Business Customer Satisfaction Study)



# “Satisfied” SMB customers ...

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Are more likely to think their utility is committed to renewable energy and sustainability; think they offer a variety of rate options, programs, and services; and that they provide resources that help them manage their energy use.

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Believe their account reps, if they have them, are performing as expected on being trustworthy, resolving issues on first contact, and understanding the needs and challenges of SMB businesses. They are more likely to recommend their account reps.

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Receive as many visits from their account reps as they say they want to be visited.

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Interact **less** with their business customer reps but feel that those reps perform as expected on most of the study’s measured attributes; they’re also willing to recommend these reps too.

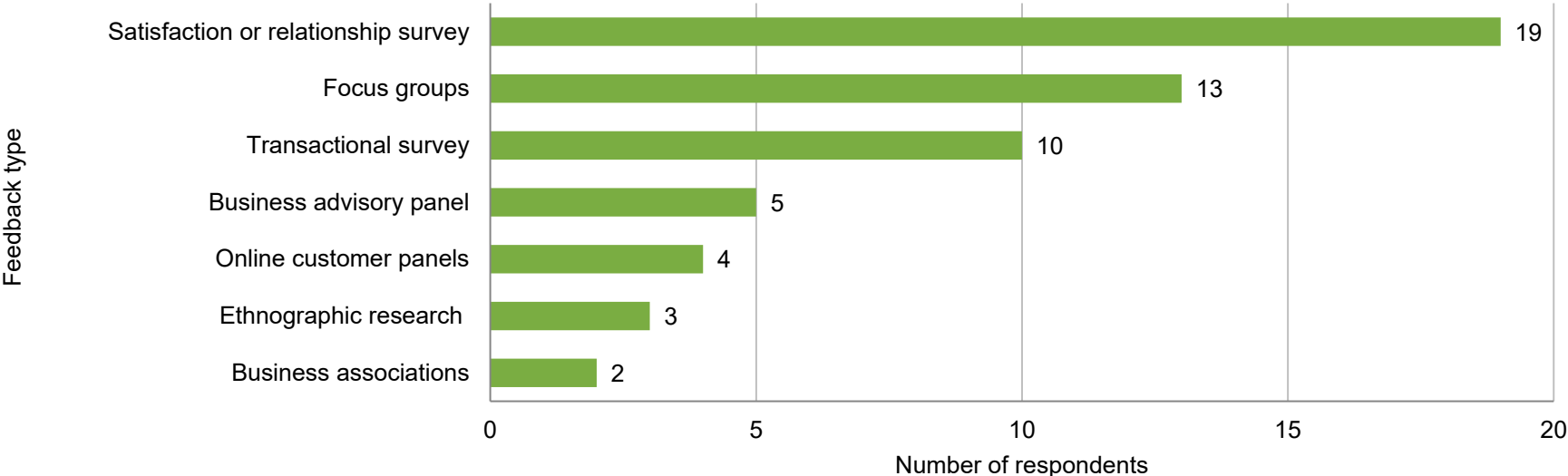
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Find interactions with their utility easier to do.

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Are more likely to trust their utility for energy efficiency advice.

# Audience poll: In what ways do you collect customer feedback from your SMB customers?

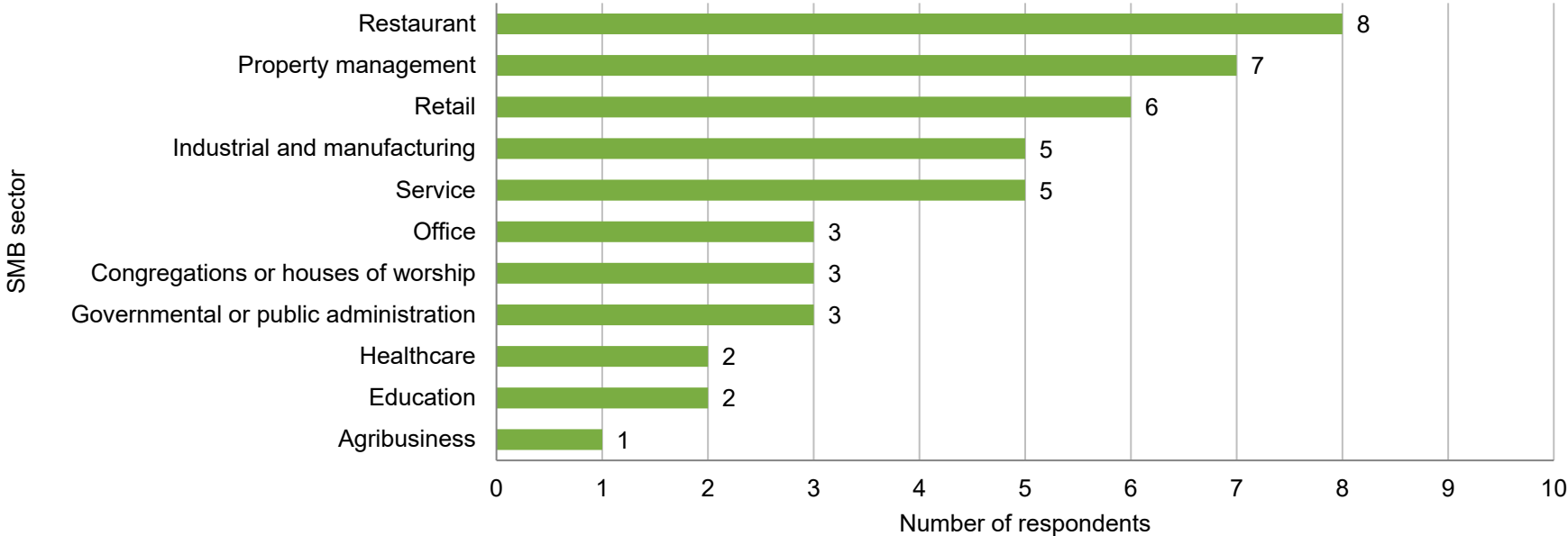


**Base:** Event attendees (n = 20). **Question:** In what ways do you collect customer feedback from your SMB customers? Select all that apply. **Notes:** SMB = small and midsize business. Use caution when sample size falls below 30. © E Source

A nighttime aerial view of a city with illuminated buildings and a complex highway interchange. The top of the image is a dark blue gradient.

# Differences among SMB sectors

# Audience poll: What SMB sectors do you concentrate your engagement efforts on?



**Base:** Event attendees (n = 14). **Question:** What SMB sectors do you concentrate your engagement efforts on? **Notes:** SMB = small and midsize business. Use caution when sample size falls below 30. © E Source

# Learn from your most satisfied and least satisfied SMB sectors

Sectors most satisfied with their utility	Sectors least satisfied with their utility
Governmental or public administration	Agribusiness and warehouse*
Healthcare	Lodging

\*Tied for low satisfaction

Sectors most satisfied with their business customer reps	Sectors least satisfied with their business customer reps
Governmental or public administration	Lodging
Education	Warehouse

# Satisfied and unsatisfied customers have suggestions for how their utility can improve

## Utility feedback

**Healthcare:** “Great communication clear and transparent with emails on their project and management”

**Warehouse:** “If there are reasonable or new ways to save on our energy expense, it would be nice to know of those opportunities.”

## Business customer rep feedback

**Governmental or public administration:** “Less wait time for a person”

**Education:** “Make it easier to connect with a representative”

**Lodging:** “Proactively advising on energy saving resources and plans to better serve my hospitality business. Clear on how to navigate my resources through the online portal. Providing a better ETA on resolution during energy outages as the business gets affected and revenue is lost.”

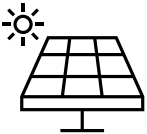
# Different energy goals can help solve sector needs



Arts, entertainment, and recreation; lodging; and governmental or public administration were most likely to have an **energy-savings goal**



Lodging and industrial and manufacturing were most likely to have an **environmental-sustainability goal**



Agribusiness and governmental or public administration were most likely to have **renewable energy goals**

# Offer the programs, products, and services that fit your SMB customers' business needs

Top five utility offerings by sector	Agribusiness	Congregations or houses of worship	Restaurant	Retail
Backup generation*	✓			
Energy management consulting	✓	✓	✓	✓
Power monitoring	✓	✓	✓	
Demand response or load curtailment	✓			
Pumps and motors or compressed air*	✓			
Energy management control systems		✓	✓	✓
Energy data analytics, strategic energy management, and behavior programs		✓	✓	✓
Fault detection and diagnostics*		✓		
Refrigeration*			✓	
Lighting				✓
Community solar*				✓

**Note:** \*Offerings in two or fewer sectors.



# Certain channels are preferred for certain information

## Regular communications

- All sectors prefer **email and phone**

## Planned outages or supply disruptions

- Most SMB sectors prefer **email**
- However, agribusiness, restaurants, and arts, entertainment, and recreation prefer **text messaging** over email

## Unplanned outages

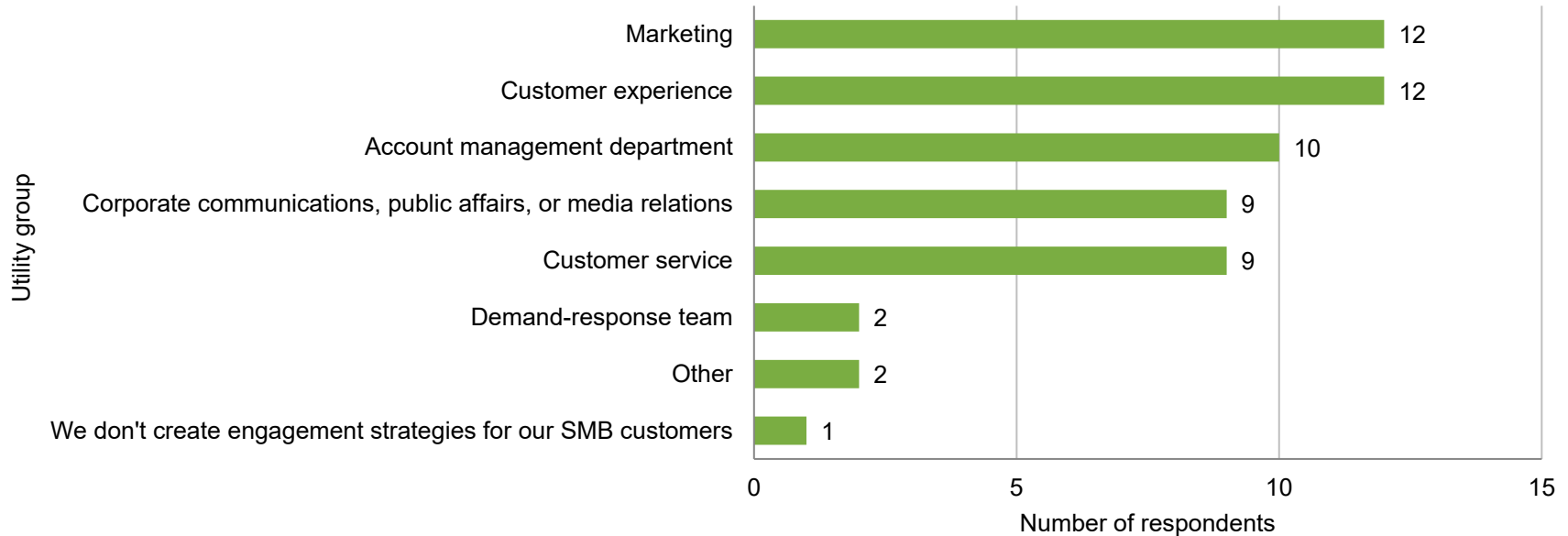
- Most sectors prefer **text messaging**
- But education, governmental or public administration, and industrial and manufacturing prefer **email**



A nighttime cityscape with illuminated buildings and a complex highway interchange, serving as the background for the slide.

# Creating successful engagements

# Audience poll: Which group(s) are involved with creating engagement strategies for your SMB customers?



**Base:** Event attendees (n = 17). **Question:** Which group(s) are involved with creating engagement strategies for your SMB customers? Select all that apply.

**Notes:** SMB = small and midsize business. Use caution when sample size falls below 30. © E Source

# Create sector plans to align customer and utility expectations



A strategic sector plan should define the sector's expectations of its relationship with your utility.

It should also have strategies for:

- Customer service
- Communications (including outage communications)
- Distributed energy
- Reliability
- Program and service offerings such as energy efficiency and rates

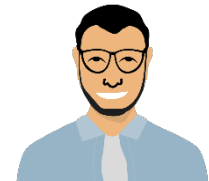
# Create SMB customer cohorts to bring different customer types to life

## What

- Include contextual information about how SMB owners spend their days.
- Talk about how busy they are at certain times of day, who they're interacting with, and what challenges they're handling.

## Why

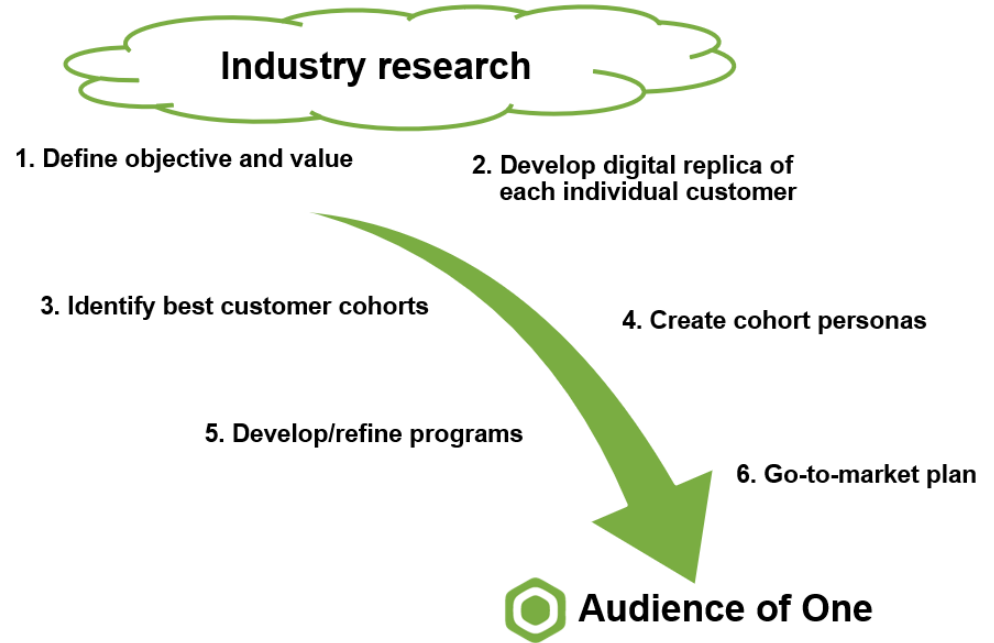
- Customers have different availability and communication needs.
- Cohorts help you think of real human beings as you create outreach and engagement strategies.



# Use microsegmentation to understand behaviors and meet specific customer needs

The most common ways utilities segment their SMB customers are by industry, needs, and location.

But using microsegmentation can take you further. This level of segmentation can help you design specific programs suitable for each individual customer. And it can help you understand the potential impact of your program.



# Choose a marketing strategy



**Concentration strategy.** Focus on understanding one segment well and developing one marketing campaign.

**Multisegmented strategy.** Focus your marketing on two or more segments and develop specific marketing campaigns for each segment.

# Build trust

- Collect testimonials
- Create business advisory panels
- Use business associations
- Partner with community groups
- Recognize customers
- Offer your expert guidance



Efficiency Manitoba

938 followers

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+ Follow ...

It's BDC Small Business Week™, and we're celebrating by shining a spotlight on recent participants of our Small Business Program. First up is The Oakwood in Winnipeg's South Osborne neighbourhood!

The Oakwood restaurant received basic upgrades including a spray valve and faucet aerators. They also upgraded their existing lighting and exit signs to LED.

Making these upgrades was affordable – we covered 70% of the costs. Plus, the energy bill savings will leave owner Wendy May with more funds to invest into her business.

"We wanted to take part in this program mainly because of the cost savings and the ease of participating," said Wendy. We want to do our part to conserve energy because every bit helps towards a better future for all of us. Going forward, these upgrades will continue to help us save money on our bills. We can use those savings to improve our business, which is a win-win."

Want to improve the energy efficiency of your small business? Check out our website to learn more about our Small Business Program.

#BDCsbw





# Alliant Energy

Alliant Energy sent a letter featuring an Iowa SMB customer testimonial and a call to action for a free energy assessment.

The letter also included a business reply card to make it easy for business customers to send their information back to the utility.

Schedule your free assessment today

Simply return the enclosed postcard, call us at 1-888-267-7516 or visit [alliantenergy.com/startsaving](http://alliantenergy.com/startsaving).

## Ladies and gentlemen, start your savings

With so much power-hungry equipment under one roof, it's no surprise that auto shops and dealerships use more energy per square foot than most office buildings. Making sure you're using all that energy as efficiently as possible can have a powerful effect on your bottom line.

As an Alliant Energy customer, you're eligible for a free energy assessment. Schedule yours today and we'll provide recommendations and rebates that could help lower your energy costs and improve your business environment.

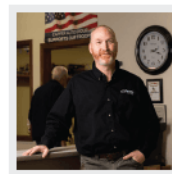
### The process is simple:

1. Schedule a time for one of our trained energy assessors to visit your business.
2. During the assessment, we'll identify energy-saving opportunities and install free energy-efficient products.
3. After the assessment, you'll receive a customized report and recommendations connecting you to rebates and additional savings.

You may also be eligible for significant rebates to upgrade your:

- Heating and cooling equipment
- Lighting
- Insulation and air sealing
- And more! Visit [alliantenergy.com/rebates](http://alliantenergy.com/rebates) for details.

Already had an energy assessment? Revisit your assessment report and contact Alliant Energy to get started on your energy efficiency recommendations.



// Lighting is a big deal in car sales and the team noticed the improvement right away. Our energy costs came down a noticeable amount, too. //

John Capper,  
Co-owner  
Capper Auto Group  
Marengo, Iowa



Courtesy: Alliant Energy

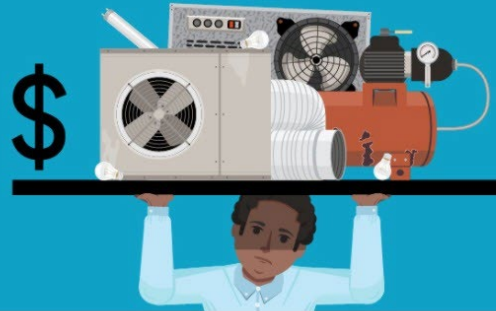
# BC Hydro

BC Hydro used digital display email ads to highlight the incentives, including potential bill savings, of participating in utility programs.

Is your inefficient equipment putting pressure on your bottom line?

Upgrade now using BC Hydro's energy-saving incentives for business and you could save over \$3,000 a year on your bill.

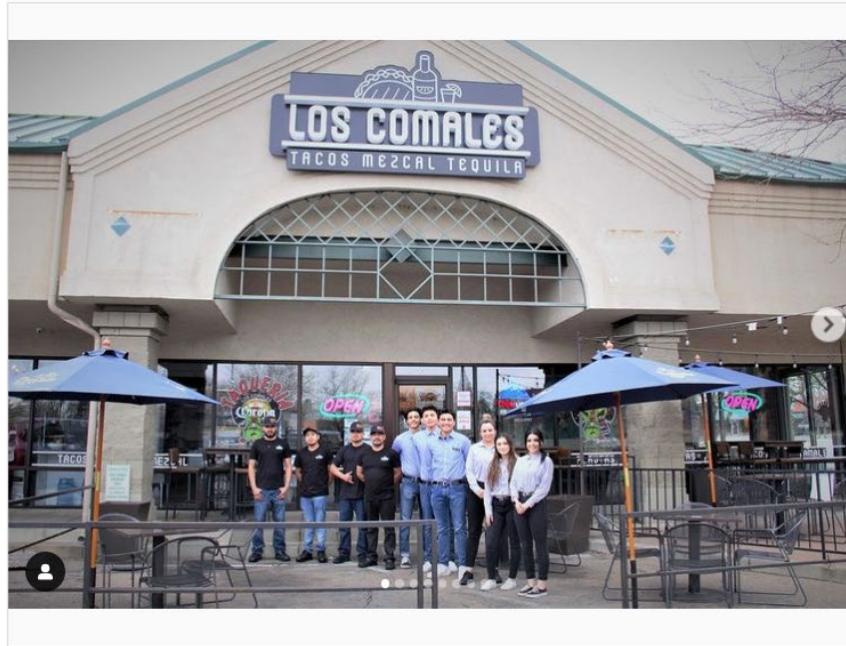
[Learn More](#)



Source: BC Hydro

# City of Fort Collins, Colorado

The City of Fort Collins promotes local businesses and shares their effect on the community.



fortcollinsgov • Follow

Fort Collins, Colorado



fortcollinsgov From farmer's markets to bowling alleys, specialty sandwiches and hand-crafted beverages, our local businesses help make Fort Collins a fun - and tasty! - place to live. 😊

We've been talking with small businesses throughout Fort Collins to find out what makes them tick. Learn more about our amazing businesses and why they chose Fort Collins as home base for their biz: [fortcollins.com/stories](https://www.fortcollins.com/stories).



298 likes

JULY 9, 2021

Log in to like or comment.



# Discussion

- How did COVID-19 change the way you interact with your SMB customers?
- What engagement strategies have you found to be most successful? What engagement strategies are you not currently using that you are thinking about using?
- What channels or engagements do you find most valuable? What has been most valuable in creating a response or increasing program enrollment, etc.? What channels or engagements do you find most valuable in terms of budget?

# Key takeaways



Understand how your SMB customers' perceptions and willingness to work with you might affect their overall satisfaction and perceived value of your utility



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# E Source Market Research

## Business Customer Satisfaction Study

Business account  
management

VOC



### About

A nationally recognized measure of business customer satisfaction, our study involves online surveys of US utilities' small and midsize business and large business customers. Our clients use insights from the study to gain a deeper understanding of their customers and identify areas where they can improve service to them. Learn more at [www.esource.com/business-customer-satisfaction-study](http://www.esource.com/business-customer-satisfaction-study).



### Participation

This study is included with membership in the E Source Account Management Service or Business Customer Suite. If a utility isn't a member, they may join the study for a fee.



### Results

Participating members of the Account Management Service or Business Customer Suite receive:

- An individualized online dashboard, pending survey response
- A raw data file and a banner
- Access to best-practice reports, webinars, and networking events
- A consultation with E Source experts upon request

Nonmembers may pay to participate in the study and access the results.

# Speak at the E Source Forum 2022

September 13–16  
Denver, CO

[www.esource.com/forum2022](http://www.esource.com/forum2022)



# Contact us



## Eryc Eyl

Senior Solution Director, Customer Experience

[eryc\\_eyl@esource.com](mailto:eryc_eyl@esource.com)



## Sarah Baker

Analyst, Market Research

[sarah\\_baker@esource.com](mailto:sarah_baker@esource.com)



## Dan Doutre

Senior Analyst, Market Research

[daniel\\_doutre@esource.com](mailto:daniel_doutre@esource.com)



## Erica Bishop

Associate Analyst, Customer Engagement Solutions

[erica\\_bishop@esource.com](mailto:erica_bishop@esource.com)

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